

Montana CWD Management Plan Update and Information and Information about 2017-2018 Surveillance and Special Hunts April 19, 2018

On November 7, 2017 FWP presented a draft *Montana CWD Management* to the Commission. That was draft 16 of the document. Based on public comment, and the work of both the internal FWP CWD Action Team and the CWD Citizen Panel, the final draft presented to the commission on April 19, 2018 is draft 20. It differs from the earlier draft mainly in the following respects:

- More language about predators and CWD management on page 5. The most common public comment we got was about the role that predators could play in CWD management.
- We have included a table of where Class II landfills in Montana (P. 10)
- A few changes to Phase I of our CWD Response plan, starting on page 19, about the structure of the Incident Command team and its role in a Special CWD Hunt. Nothing major here, but some refinements based on our experience.
- New language on page 20 (first paragraph under Step 2) concerning our response to a new detection. Not every new detection will require an immediate Special CWD Hunt. We have learned that we can get a lot of samples during the general hunting season, and have included the option of doing intensive sampling to determine disease prevalence during the next, or following, general season. Especially since CWD was discovered in the state, hunters are wanting to get their animal tested.
- A change to using $\pm 3\%$ instead of $\pm 2\%$ as our target for the confidence interval around the disease prevalence estimate when we do a Special CWD Hunt (see pages 22 and 29). This substantially reduced necessary sample sizes during the hunts, and consequently we think was more palatable to the public, yet still yields satisfactory prevalence estimates for managing CWD.
- Changes throughout the document to reflect the fact that we have now found CWD. Earlier drafts talked about “when” we find it.
- A change in the 5% prevalence “threshold” idea. Earlier drafts of the plan said that we may not need to change management (i.e. hunting season, etc.) if prevalence was $< 5\%$. But based on internal comments and those of researchers and managers in CWD-positive states (e.g. Dr. Bryan Richards, USGS CWD lead; Dr. Mike Samuel, Prof. Emeritus Univ. of Wisc. and internationally-recognized authority on CWD; Dr. Lee Jones, Wildlife Health point person for USFWS), we should do everything we can to prevent prevalence from growing and the disease spreading. The final draft speaks to initiating long-term CWD management actions (changing season types, etc.) with any detection, even at low prevalence. This was discussed at length at our March 14 CWD Advisory Committee meeting, and all concur with the approach. Page 27 of the plan now says, “Even if prevalence is below 5%, FWP will initiate CWD management to keep prevalence low and help prevent disease spread.”
- Related to the above bullet point, in the “CWD in special buck/bull management hunting districts” section we say (p. 26), “Once CWD is detected in these types of districts, regardless of prevalence, FWP would propose an antlered-buck or either-sex mule deer season for the district.”
- We added language about preemptive management in hunting districts adjacent to CWD-positive areas (p. 28) – “FWP may choose to preemptively manage for CWD in hunting districts adjacent to CWD-positive areas.”
- We have included examples of letters residents, landowners and hunters (pp 44-48).

Montana CWD Surveillance and Response actions during 2017-2018

Surveillance

- Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks initiated the first year of the revised CWD Surveillance Plan in portions of region 3 and region 5 during the 2017 hunting season.
- A weighted surveillance strategy was aimed at detecting CWD in areas where the disease was thought most likely to occur and was designed to detect CWD at 1% prevalence with 95% confidence.
- The surveillance effort focused primarily on mule deer given their relatively high susceptibility. Samples from elk and moose were also collected at check stations.
- Samples were collected from hunter harvested animals as well as road killed animals. In addition to this systematic surveillance, symptomatic animals from across the state continue to be sampled for CWD.
- Retropharyngeal lymph nodes and obex (brain tissue) were tested at Colorado State University for \$17/sample. Follow up confirmation test for suspects is \$35.00. Moose tests are \$35.
- Funding for surveillance was covered primarily through a PR grant with match from deer and elk auction license funds. Mule Deer Foundation and Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation also contributed funding for CWD testing.
- Dr. Stephen Smith (Montana Department of Livestock Diagnostic Lab) has been looking into requirements/costs for the MDOL lab to do CWD testing in Montana. This could potentially shorten the time to receive test results. This has also been a topic in the lab consolidation exploratory effort.

Preliminary Surveillance Results

- 1,391 samples collected from mule deer, white-tailed deer, elk and moose in priority surveillance areas of FWP Regions 3 and 5
- 6 CWD positive deer (4 mule deer bucks, 1 mule deer doe, and 1 white tailed doe) were detected in R5 during general season surveillance.
- No CWD positive animals were detected in R3.
- One radio-collared mule deer buck that was harvested in HD 401 near Chester also tested positive during general season.

Post-detection

- An incident Command System was established in R5 and R4 upon detection. The FWP regional supervisor in each area served as incident Commander
- Montana Department of Livestock and Montana Department of Health and Human Services participated on the Incident Command Team along with FWP staff.
- A special CWD hunt was carried out within the designated Initial Response Area (IRA) in R5 (Bridger Hunt) and in R4 (Sage Creek Hunt) to determine prevalence and distribution of CWD.
- Transport Restriction Zones (TRZ) were established to minimize the risk of moving parts of CWD infected animals across the state.
- Sampling/testing was mandatory during the CWD hunt
- Licenses sold out very quickly for both hunts (1200 for R5; 335 for R4 hunt) @ \$10 for residents and \$20 for nonresidents.

Bridger Special CWD Hunt (parts of 502, 510, 520): December 15, 2018-February 15, 2018

- Mule Deer Quota: 200 (214 harvested)
- White-tailed Deer Quota: 200 (131 harvested)

- Estimated prevalence in mule deer in IRA, combining samples from general season and the Special hunt (10 positive deer total, 8 mule deer and 2 white-tailed deer) ~0.02 (95% CI: 0.01, 0.04).
- Estimated prevalence in white-tailed deer in IRA~0.01 (95% CI: 0, 0.03)
- CWD positive animals detected were not uniformly distributed throughout the IRA. If the part of the IRA made up by only HD 510 is separated for analysis, prevalence in that part of the IRA is higher ~0.10 (95% CI: 0.05, 0.19).

Sage Creek Special CWD Hunt (part of HD 401): January 6, 2018-February 15, 2018.

- Mule Deer Quota: 157 (113 harvested)
- Estimated prevalence in mule deer ~ 0.008 (0.001-0.04). No additional CWD-positive deer were found during the special hunt. The only positive from HD 401 found was the mule deer buck serendipitously sampled during general season.

Incident Commander from R5 lead an After-Action Review (AAR) on Friday, March 2nd. The Review was attended by the members of the Incident Command Team from both the R4 and R5 CWD Initial Response Areas (IRAs), including personnel from the Montana Department of Livestock and the Montana Department of Health and Human Services.

2017-18 Special CWD Hunt licenses sold by type and hunter residency.

CWD Hunt	Species	Either-Sex Licenses			Antlerless Licenses			Total Licenses		
		Res	Non-Res	Total	Res	Non-Res	Total	Res	Non-Res	Total
Bridger	Mule Deer	67	33	100	353	147	500	420	180	600
	WTD	82	18	100	399	101	500	481	119	600
	Total	149	51	200	752	248	1,000	901	299	1,200
Sage Creek	Mule Deer	49	11	60	241	34	275	290	45	335
Total		198	62	260	993	282	1,275	1,191	344	1,535

Next Steps:

- The CWD Citizen's Advisory Panel met March 14-15 and will remain in place at least until a final CWD Plan is adopted by the commission.
- Staff will be meeting in early April to discuss future management in CWD-endemic areas in R4 and R5. Earlier drafts of the plan said that we may not need to change management (i.e. hunting season, etc.) if prevalence was <5%. But based on comments from researchers and managers in CWD-positive states, we should do everything we can to prevent prevalence from growing, and the final version speaks to initiating long-term CWD management with any detection, even at low prevalence.